

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 /053 W

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R 192200Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7057

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

USCINCSO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SAN SALVADOR 4977

E.O. 11652 - GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, SHUM, ES

SUBJ: INCIDENT BETWEEN SECURITY FORCES AND CAMPESINOS AT LA
CAYETANA

REF: A) HSS-2520, DEC 9, 1974; B) SAN SALVADOR A-169; C) SAN SALVADOR
A-176

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1. SUMMARY - A CLASH BETWEEN SECURITY FORCES AND CAMPESINOS IN A
SMALL VILLAGE IN SAN VICENTE DEPARTMENT NOVEMBER 29 REPORTEDLY
LEFT AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF CAMPESINOS DEAD AND WOUNDED (VARIOUS
UNCONFIRMED REPORTS ESTIMATE THE DEAD AT FROM 6 TO 27).
CHURCH, LABOR AND OPPOSITION POLITICAL GROUPS HAVE ISSUED
DENUNCIATIONS OF THE INCIDENT AND DEMANDED A FULL INVESTIGA-
TION. THUS FAR, THE GOVERNMENT HAS NOT ACTED ON THESE
DEMANDS, AND THIS HAS TENDED TO LEND CREDENCE IN THE
PUBLIC MIND TO THE OPPOSITION'S DESCRIPTION OF THE
INCIDENT. THE INCIDENT HAS CREATED SOME POLITICAL TENSION
AT A TIME WHEN THE MOLINA GOVERNMENT IS TRYING TO IMPROVE ITS
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RELATIONS WITH CAMPESINOS - END SUMMARY.

2. ON THE AFTERNOON OF NOV 29 A CLASH TOOK PLACE BETWEEN SECURITY FORCES AND CAMPESINOS IN THE SMALL VILLAGE (45 CHOZAS OR HUTS) OF LA CAYETANA, SAN VICENTE DEPARTMENT. THE INITIAL GOES VERSION -- THAT ARMED "DELINQUENTS" AMBUSHED A GOVERNMENT PATROL, LEAVING FOUR CIVILIANS DEAD AND ONE AGENT WOUNDED -- HAS BEEN PROGRESSIVELY ERODED BY ITS PERSISTENT REFUSAL TO SHED LIGHT ON THE INCIDENT AND BY REPORTED EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNTS WHICH, THROUGH NOT CONSISTENT IN ALL DETAILS, POINT TO A CONFLICT BETWEEN UNARMED OR POORLY ARMED CIVILIANS AND ARMED SECURITY FORCEK.

3. THE INFORMATION IN PARAS 3 AND 4 WAS SUPPLIED BY A MEMBER OF THE SOL-ANGULO FAMILY THAT OWNS THE LAND ON WHICH LA CAYETANA IS LOCATED (WHO IS WELL-KNOWN TO THE EMBASSY) AND BY PDC LEADER FIDEL CHAVEZ MENA, NORMALLY A KNOWLEDGEABLE OPPOSITION POLITICAL OBSERVER. IT PARTLY CONFIRMS AND PARTLY CONTRADICTS REF A. THE ABSENTEE OWNER OF THE PROPERTY IS SRA. FNU ANGULA DE SOL, WHO BROTHER, FORMER PCN GOVERNOR OF SAN VICENTE FABIO NICOLAS NAGULO CASTILLO, OWNS THE ADJACENT FINCA. HE DOES NOT PARTICIPATE IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF HIS SISTER'S LAND AND IS BELIEVED TO HAVE PLAYED NO ROLE IN THE EVENTS OF NOV. 26-29. ONE PORTION OF THE SOL-ANGULO LAND, A COTTON FIELD, IS LEASED TO ANA MARGOTH MENDEZ, A WEALTHY, ATTRACTIVE SOCIALITE WHO RECENTLY MARRIED ENRIQUE DEL CED FERNANDEZ, FIRST SECRETARY OF THE GUATEMALAN EMBASSY. SOME SIX MONTHS AGO, THE VILLAGERS TRIED EITHER TO BUILD HOUSES OR TO PLANT CROPS ON THE LEASED COTTON FIELD. THE ISSUE WAS RESOLVED BY LAWYERS WITHOKT VIOLENCE, BUT LEFT A RESIDUE OF TENSION AND ILL WILL. IN ADDITION, THE AREA IS STRONGLY ANTI-GOVERNMENT AND HAS SPAWNED A NUMBER OF PROGRESSIVE UCTIVITISTS LIKE FATHER DAVID JOSE RODRIGUEZ RIVAS, A 34-YEAR OLD PRIEST WHO HAS WON A NUMBER OF POLITICAL, IF NOT SPIRITUAL, CONVERTS AMONG LA CAYETANA'S RESIDENTS. (CHAVEZ INSISTS THAT RODRIGUEZ'S WORK WAS PRIMARILY TO ORGANIZE THE PEASANTS INTO COOPERATIVES). ACCORDING TO THESE COURCES, RODRIGUEZ WAS NOT PRESENT AT LA CAYETANA DURING THE INCIDENTS DESCRIBED IN PARA 4.

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4. ON NOV 26, POLICE DETECTIVES CAME TO LA CAYETANA TO ARREST LEONCIO HERNANDEZ FOR ALLEGED ILLEGAL POSSESSION OF ARMS. THOUGH NO ARMS WERE FOUND, HERNANDEZ WAS DETAINED BY THE POLICE. AS THEY ATTEMPTED TO LEAVE THE VILLAGE, THE CAMPESINOS, ALERTED BY THE RINGING OF A BELL, BLOCKED THE ROAD AND FORCED THE DETECTIVES TO RELEASE HERNANDEZ, THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF ONE OF THE COOPS AND A VILLAGE LEADER. ACCORDING TO SOME REPORTS, A DETECTIVE WAS WOUNDED OR OTHER-

WISE INJURED IN THE ENSUING SCUFFLE. BEFORE WITHDRAWING, THE DETECTIVES PROMISED TO RETURN IN FORCE. ON THE AFTER-NOON OF NOV 29, ABOUT 80 NATIONAL GUARD AND NATIONAL POLICE AGENTS ARRIVED, ARMED WITH THE MACHINE GUNS THEY NORMALLY CARRY AS WELL AS GRENADES AND AT LEAST ONE MORTAR. THEY SURROUNDED LA CAYETANA, THEN CAPTURED, BEAT AND HUMILIATED THE MEN OF THE VILLAGE. THE FORCES BEGAN TO SHOOT SPONTANEOUSLY IN RESPONSE TO A SHOW OF UNARMED RESISTANCE BY ONE OR MORE VILLAGERS. THE AGENTS ALSO PURSUE OTHER CAMPESINOS ATTEMPTING TO FLEE. ACCORDING TO SOME UNCONFIRMED ESTIMATES AS MANY AS 27 CAMPESINOS WERE REPORTEDLY KILLED, 15 MORE WERE WOUNDED, 30 WERE ARRESTED AND OTHERS ARE STILL MISSING. GOVERNMENT SOURCES REPORTEDLY CLAIM ONLY A HALF-DOZEN DEATHS. AT LEAST SOME OF THE DEAD ARE BELIEVED TO BE COFFEE PICKERS FROM A NEARBY VILLAGE WHO PASSED BY LA CAYETANA ON THEIR WAY HOME FROM WORK. THE BODIES, NUDE AND MUTILATED IN MOST INSTANCES, WERE LEFT IN SEVERAL LOCATIONS. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, ONLY SIX HAVE THUS FAR BEEN RECOVERED AND TURNED OVER TO AUTHORITIES.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SAN SALVADOR 4977

5. THE OPPOSITION PARTIES QUICKLY MOVED TO MAKE POLITICAL HAY,

COMPARING THE INCIDENT TO THE MY LAI MASSACRE, JULIO ALFREDO SAMAYOA H., PDC DEPUTY FOR SAN VICENTE, WAS AMONG THE FIRST TO LEARN OF THE INCIDENT. AFTER CONSULTING WITH THE PDC POLITICAL COMMITTEE, SAMAYOA PUBLISHED A FULL PAGE PAID STATEMENT IN THE DEC 4 PRESS, CALLING FOR A FULL INVESTIGATION BY THE DEFENSE MINISTER. THE PCN MAJORITY IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY VOTED DOWN THE PDC MOTION FOR A GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATION, PROVOKING A WALKOUT OF OPPOSITION DEPUTIES (EXCEPT FOR ADRIAN ALAS QUIJADA, WHO WAS SUMMARILY EXPELLED FROM THE PDC; SEE REF C). THE PCN TRIED TO TAKE THE STING OUT OF THE OPPOSITION ATTACK BY ACCUSING AN UNNAMED PRIEST (OBVIOUSLY RODRIGUEZ) OF AGITATING THE CAMPESINOS AGAINST THE LANDOWNERS OF THE AREA. THOUGH THE COUNTER-CHARGE STRUCK RESPONSIVE CHORDS IN MANY CIRCLES, THE SOL-ANGULO FAMILY PRIVATELY DENIES THAT THERE WAS ANY SERIOUS PROBLEM.

6. THE ATTACK ON RODRIGUEZ, HOWEVER, PRODUCED A FORCEFUL REACTION ON THE PART OF THE CHURCH AUTHORITIES WHO HAVE SPOKEN OUT WITH UNCHARACTERISTIC VIGOR. THOUGH IN GENERAL TERMS, THE CONFIDENTIAL

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ARCHBISHOP LECTURED THE ASSEMBLY ON RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, DEC 5 KREJUP#. PRESIDENT MOLINA ADDED FUEL TO THE FIRE, HOWEVER, WITH HIS DEC 6 WARNING THAT "LIBERATIONIST" PRIESTS FACED "DRASTIC" PENALTIES IF THEY PERSISTED IN AGITATING AMONG THE CAMPESINOS. ON DEC 10 (HUMAN RIGHTS DAY), THE COUNTRY'S SEVEN BISHOPS ISSUED A SHORT STATEMENT DEPLORING THE INCIDENT AS A "FLAGRANT VIOLATION" OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND CONDEMNING VIOLENCE AS A SOLUTION TO NATIONAL PROBLEMS. THE STATEMENT REFERS ONLY TO THE DEATH OF "SIX DEFENSELESS AND INNOCENT CAMPESINOS." THE STATEMENT WAS POINTED YET RESTRAINED IN TONE, PARTLY IN RESPONSE TO THE URGINGS OF THE PAPAL NUNCIO FOR MODERATION.

7. CAMPESINO LEADERS ASSUME THAT THE ORDER FOR A PUNITIVE OPERATION, PROBABLY INVOLVING INTIMIDATION RATHER THE DEATHS, CAME FROM NATIONAL GUARD DIRECTOR GENERAL COL JOSE MARIO ROSALES Y ROSALES, WHOSE REPUTATION FOR RUTHLESSNESS HAS COST THE MOLINA GOVERNMENT SOME POLITICAL SUPPORT IN THE COUNTRY SIDE. DEFENSE MINISTER COL CARLOS HUMBERTO ROMERO, WHO HAS A LONG STANDING DISLIKE OF ROSALES, MAY ATTEMPT TO USE THE INCIDENT TO WEAKEN HIS RIVAL'S POSITION IN THE GOVERNMENT. IN THE PAST, HOWEVER, MOLINA HAS RESISTED PRESSURE FROM ROMERO TO REPLACE ROSALES, HIS MILITARY ACADEMY CLASSMATE AND A POWERFUL ALLY.

8. COMMENT: OUR PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT IS THAT THE GOES FAILURE

TO CLARIFY ITS POSITION ON THE INCIDENT OR EVEN TO INVESTIGATE IT TO DETERMINE RESPONSIBILITY HAS FOSTERED SPECULATION AND IS HAVING POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES, AT LEAST FOR THE SHORT-RUN. OPPOSITION POLITICAL GROUPS HAVE GONE FURTHER THAN THEY NORMALLY RISK IN ATTACKING THE GOES TACTICS. GOES RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH ARE AGAIN STRAINED. LEADERS OF THE UNION COMUNAL SALVADORENA (UCS), BY FAR THE LARGEST CAMPESINO ORGANIZATION IN EL SALVADOR, ARE BITTER AND MORE MISTRUSTFUL OF THE GOVERNMENT, ESPECIALLY THE NATIONAL GUARD.

9. WE WILL, OF COURSE, CONTINUE TO ATTEMPT TO ASCERTAIN THE FACTS OF THE INCIDENT AND THEIR MEANING.

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